

THE COMMUNITY: VILLAGE AND TOWN

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62/ 57/ pacts of friendship made, visits, feasts, and meetings organized regularly. Contacts and forms of intercourse may stretch beyond this area—they regularly do in trade connexions or in the contacts involved in the political system of the country. Moreover, modern communications have greatly extended their scope. Yet these contacts and single lines of intercourse hardly affect the self-containedness of the community. A sign of the tendency to seek regular contacts with places and groups without is travelling. And here we see that the villagers evince little interest in travelling and in visits to other towns and countries.¹ In the small Beni village Pichi, about five miles from Bida, only three men out of fifty have been across the Kaduna river or outside the area of their sub-tribe. Most peasants, at least the older men, with whom I have discussed travelling, said in so many words that travelling had no interest for them.

62/ 186 [484] Again, the self-limitation of community life expresses itself in the parochial outlook of the villagers. There is a striking lack of interest in the life and customs of the peoples 'outside'; or the interest is of that lofty and self-centred kind that will credit anything unusual reported of 'foreigners'. When discussing with villagers the customs, for example, or the religious rites, of neighbouring communities you will be told: 'We don't know; we do this and that, but they may have different customs', or you will be given unreliable, second-hand information, often biased and sensationally made up. Certain of these opinions have become quite firmly rooted—commonly accepted popular theories about other communities. The people of Jebba Island professed to know nothing about the religious practices of Gbajibo, a village some twenty miles up the river—they have quite different customs there' is what they told me. A visit to Gbajibo revealed that the religious practices of the two places were almost identical. In Bida and Doko I was told that the people of Etsú were blacksmiths by origin and possessed special blacksmith magic. The people of Etsú themselves had a quite different tradition of origin and their magical rites had nothing to do with blacksmith work. In several Nupe villages the people told me that while they themselves performed the *gunnu* ritual in the open, other villages possessed special sacred *gunnu* huts. I examined every case, but found no trace of this reported difference. This tendency to assume non-existent and exaggerate insignificant cultural differences between one's own village and other communities represents, on the ideological plane, the assertion of the cultural identity of the community. As in the case of the tribe, we find an ideology heedless of empirical facts supplying the conceptual background for a social configuration.

We must, however, qualify these statements about the self-contained nature of the village community. There exists one kind of interest and knowledge—and this time keen interest and on the whole well-informed knowledge—which embraces groups outside of the village community, namely, interest and knowledge bearing on the kingdom, its countries

¹ I am speaking here of the inland villages and not, of course, of the riverain Nupe, whose very existence depends on travelling. Nor do I refer here to migrations and similar permanent changes of residence.

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TRADE AS A PROFESSION

The majority of professional traders in Nupe are Bida men and women. For these professional traders the restriction to the small areas which are characteristic of inter-village trade does not apply. The whole country, and indeed the whole of Nigeria, is their field of activity. Trade, business, is independent of the boundaries of a community, a tribe, or language. Inside Nupe one of the results of this extensive trade is the regularization of hospitality towards traders in all larger villages of the country. Only a few traders may be able to find relations in the distant places to which their business takes them. The others are free to stop in every house. The rules with regard to the compensation for this form of hospitality which does not fall in the category of kinship duties vary locally. In Mokwa the guest maintains himself and is expected to give his host a parting gift of 10-15 kola-nuts (representing about 11. 6d. in money). In Kacha, a much larger business centre, the population of which consists to a very large extent of traders, a stranger who has no relatives in the place may go to the chief, who will allot quarters to him. The guest receives lodging as well as food, but is not expected to make any gifts in return; he is expected only to return the hospitality in his own village should his host be taken there on his business trips.

Outside Nupe the Nupe traders are frequently more than merely birds of passage. They stay at a place for several months or even years at a time, and may possibly settle there permanently. We find such colonies of Nupe traders in every larger town of Nigeria, in the northern Emirates as well as in the Europeanized centres of trade in the south. In the north they speak Hausa; in the south they can mostly get on with Nupe (only a few Nupe men and women have learned Yoruba). Not the least convincing evidence of the century-old route of Nupe trade to the south, down the river Niger, is that Nupe language is understood all along this route. In places on the lower Niger where the lingua franca of the north, Hausa, is no longer understood I found that the people would speak and understand Nupe. Although in the life of the traders tribal and cultural affinities are subordinated to business interests, these links re-emerge in a new form. In these foreign parts where the Nupe live as aliens, they are drawn together by the link of their common language and common origin. They form small cultural enclaves, Nupe colonies, and tend to live together in the same part of the town. These colonies do not form social units or communities in the narrow sense of the word; rather, they are fluid, semi-temporary, groups brought together by the chance of common enterprise. They can hardly be homogeneous; they contain men and women from different sub-tribes and parts of Nupe country. Moreover, they spring up suddenly, and may disappear again as suddenly, owing to changes in the economic conditions. But while they exist they show a strong tendency to develop something like an organized community life. They all feel themselves as Nupe; they recognize the ranks and forms of status valid at home and elect a head or chief in Nupe fashion. Many men and women in these colonies are joined in the consue

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of time by their family and relations; and many will, or hope that they will, some day return to their home country.¹

In this description I have dealt with professional and non-professional traders as if they represented sharply distinct classes. There is, in fact, good sense in speaking in Nupe of *cewoce* or *koragba*, 'trader', as against other professions. The line of division, however, is fluid. It is more fluid among women than among men. Among the men we can at least define the extremes: the big trader is nothing but a trader, and the cultivator or guild craftsman is never a trader. But trade on a small scale goes hand in hand with the individual crafts and 'free professions', and an occasional business deal is welcome to everybody. But here a further distinction is necessary. The Nupe distinguish between traders proper and brokers, *dilali*. The brokers have as a rule their booths on the market, and undertake to sell goods for their clients for a small commission. It is interesting to note that while the Nupe traders are 'free' professions in every respect, the brokers are organized in a guild-like organization. They elect a guild-head, the *Etsu* or *Sarkin Dilali*, who is confirmed by the king and keeps in close contact with the court. As soon as a new trade caravan arrives at the *wongu* (the traders' camp outside the gates of Bida) he will go and see the traders and inspect their goods. It is his duty also to inform the king of caravans and goods that have arrived. He must ascertain the king's wishes with respect to these goods before he allows them to be placed on the open market. Here, then, we find again the element of political control which is so closely associated with guild organization. The *Etsu Dilali*, placed in control over all Bida brokers, levies a small fee from them, in return for which he guarantees them equal access to the valuable and profitable goods which arrive in Bida from abroad. He, and through him the whole organization of brokers, thus guarantee to clients and fellow members an efficient marketing organization, the avoidance of unsound competition, and business integrity. The organization of brokers differs in certain respects essentially from the guild organization proper. It does not utilize the principles of kinship (real or fictitious); nor does it attempt in any other way to ensure the solidarity and continuity of the professional group. It represents a 'free' association of 'free' business men, coming very close to the principle of the modern professional union.

DIVISION OF LABOUR BETWEEN THE SEXES (III)

The market census given above has shown that marketing and trade, too, are subject to the rules regulating division of labour between men and women. We can formulate certain general rules: all food-stuffs and agricultural produce, and of native industrial products manufactured by men those that are typical women's articles, are traded by women. To the first category must also be counted the native stimulants, tobacco for

¹ These remarks refer to a typical Nupe traders' colony in Ibadan which I have studied at some length. An instance of a trading-colony which has sprung up quite suddenly is Agege, a village ten miles north of Lagos, which, in 1936, had been in existence for five years only.

511 characterize the standards of living of the lower social strata—with their
556 meaning significantly altered. For 'maintenance of labour' read increase
of capital and wealth; for 'demands of the community' dictates of status
and prestige. The latter pervade the whole field of expenditure. Ex-
penditure of wealth in any form, whatever its primary and avowed pur-
pose, represents expenditure for the sake of status and prestige at the
same time.

Investment of capital in human labour—slaves, pawns, or clients—
also enhances the prestige of the man who can afford such investment
and the life of leisure which it entails. The lavish scale of kinship feasts
similarly reflects social status. Presents on a generous scale, to the king
or influential noblemen, or liberal hospitality as befits the man of sub-
stance, are at the same time practical means of winning the favour of
social superiors and securing a reliable political following. In the house
of a Bida nobleman of moderately high standing, for example, six *bara*
who lived with him, and five *bara* who lived outside, in their own houses,
were daily guests at at least one meal—a hospitality which very nearly
doubled household expenses.¹

511 In a society in which marriage is by bride-price, and by high bride-
554 price at that, the marriage arrangements must also become an index of
595 wealth and status. Wealth and status are infallibly reflected in the
number of wives a man possesses. We have seen that, while small
peasants or small craftsmen, and traders are content with one or two
wives, no Bida man of standing would have less than four, and many
even considerably more (whether legitimate wives or concubines). We
will not exaggerate the share of prestige and status in this 'investment':
the practice in the houses of the nobility to 'pension off' ageing wives
and replace them by young attractive girls shows the contribution of
more concrete motives also. On the other hand, wealthy Bida families
will pride themselves in marrying off their sons at an early age, four to
five years before they reach what is normally regarded as marriageable
age. This is clearly done for the sake of prestige of the parents rather
than for the benefit of the boy-husband, who, for example, may still be
a pupil in the Government school (I have known of two such).

511 This twofold significance of economic incentives among the *élite* of
554 Nupe society is no less clearly pronounced in expenditure of a more
565 personal nature. 'Clothes make the man' in Nupe as elsewhere; in the
possession of arms one sees not only fighting equipment, and in the
possession of a horse not only a means of transport, but symbols of rank
and status. I will conclude this list with the description of one cultural
incentive which carries the concept of status and prestige into a rather
remote domain of social life—travelling. Travelling forms indeed part
of the life of the Nupe gentleman, and the young men of the higher
nobility, especially the princes of the royal house, are sent, like their
brothers in Victorian England, on a traditional Grand Tour. It takes
them through the northern Emirates, to the cities and courts of famous

¹ The total consumption at the midday meal was approximately 5 lb. of
porridge, made with fish and palm-oil sauce. The share of the family, including
the family head, his wives, and his children, was 3 lb., that of the *bara* 2 lb.

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rulers, with whom they stay as honoured guests, and whom they will repay, one day, by similar hospitality extended to their young relations. (I have mentioned, in a different context, how I met two princes from Sokoto whose Grand Tour had taken them to the court of the *Etsu Nupe* in Bida.) The noble tourists enjoy their travels and enjoy—as they put it—‘seeing the world’. But this incentive of travelling for travelling’s sake with which their education and cultural background inculcate them also serves, indirectly, the political purpose of fostering personal contacts and ties of friendship between the ruling families of Nigeria and, more specially, the widespread Fulani empire.

We must now ask ourselves to what extent these wants and incentives apply to the society at large and determine (more or less) the economic decisions of the people. We must ask, more particularly, whether there do not exist ‘upper limits’ by which the economic ambitions of the various classes are bounded—whether by choice or of necessity. Such limits exist in the form of objects and values which have come to be regarded as fixed symbols of political status and which, like status itself, are excluded from free economic choice, being attainable only by the ladder of social promotion. As fixed symbols of status, much as a uniform or decoration in our society, the glazed turban of the nobility, or the right to carry a silver sword, cannot be coveted as such. This limitation has also been accepted with respect to the recent innovation, the clock in the glass case carried by the body-servant of a noble master: the people outside the ranks of the nobility have not attempted—as well they might—to possess themselves of this new emblem of rank.

But though promotion to political status and acquisition of its paraphernalia represent things that ‘cannot be bought’ (we shall discuss certain exceptions later), most of the features characteristic of the social life on these more exalted planes are, in theory, of the nature of universal economic wants. Beautiful clothes, costly turbans, and the possession of a horse are widely desired and can be acquired by anyone who can afford the expense. Even wants which are so far beyond the means or labour which commoners and peasants can muster that for this reason alone they seem unlikely to become concrete ambitions outside the *élite* of the country, represent yet common wants and ideals. Thus we find the ornate high-gabled square or round entrance hut which is typical of the large houses of the Bida nobility also in certain villages, put up by chiefs or prosperous family heads. Beautifully ornamented houses of a more modest type, moreover, are found everywhere, in every section or stratum of the population. Now, one of the most convincing proofs of the universality of these economic wants is the absence of all unfavourable comments, especially in the form of ridicule, with respect to individuals reaching out for goals not normally attained in their station of life. This is a significant illustration: in the small village of Doko I observed one house built in an unusually sumptuous style—with coloured earthenware plates inlaid in the walls of the *katamba*. It belonged to a musician, an ordinary ‘commoner’, who had been very successful in his profession. The people who told me about the house and its owner admitted that he was neither a titled elder nor in any way

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WANTS AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Let me repeat that all these wants and incentives which are realized in the social *élite* also represent common incentives of the society at large, and of every social stratum, unattainable though they may appear in actuality. They remain 'ideals', and the inability to realize them is regarded as a failure, a shortcoming in the socio-economic system. There exist, however, certain exceptions: instances of that divergence, or rift, in the appreciation of certain wants and incentives which divides town and country. Though few in number, they occur in widely different domains of social life—nutrition, recreation, sex morality.

Certain instances concern the form of a want, the conventionalized taste in which it appears, rather than its essence. I have spoken in an earlier context of the different taste in intoxicants typical of town and country. The Bida people prefer palm-wine to the sorghum-beer which is drunk commonly in the village. Palm-wine is the native drink in the oil-palm countries of Southern Nigeria; we also find it, side by side with sorghum-beer, in certain riverain districts of Nupe where the oil-palm is cultivated. Bida itself imports palm-wine from these districts and the south. The adoption of this, as it were, alien drink by the people of Bida was explained to me as being due to the demands of Islam, which forbids fermented drinks like sorghum-beer, but permits palm-wine—at least in the eyes of the Nupe followers of the Prophet. I do not know how far this vindication of palm-wine will pass muster with Mohammedan scholars. But I think we may accept the negative feature of this interpretation, namely, the condemnation on religious grounds of sorghum-beer, which, as we shall see presently, represents a drink closely associated with pagan religious rites. Or I might quote the instance of the different styles of dance and music appreciated in Bida and in the peasant districts: in the town we find the dance of professional women-dancers who are watched by an appreciative audience; in the village the dance of peasant men and women who are performers and public in one.

In other tastes and wants town and country differ fundamentally. Let me quote two striking examples: the attitude towards sexual licence (about which I need say no more here),¹ and the attitude towards travelling. What I have said above about the appreciation of travelling in the social *élite* of the country could be extended to apply to the whole of Bida. To have travelled widely, to have 'seen the world', helps to establish the social standing of the townsman. The interest in travels even outweighs other, similar, interests. When I was collecting Nupe folk-lore I met with almost complete failure in Bida, although the villages had proved a most fruitful field. And this was the explanation which my Bida informants gave me: 'You must go to the villages to hear folk-tales. We Bida people have forgotten them all. No one wants them now. Why? Because when we tell stories, in the evenings, we like to hear about travels, and about other towns; we listen to the people who

¹ See Chaps. IX, XIX.

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can tell us about Kano, Zaria, or Lagos.' The widespread familiarity with travelling, indeed the love of travelling, which characterizes the Bida people, has no counterpart among the peasants.¹ We have heard that even journeys to another district are rare and of little appeal to the villagers.

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How are we to explain this negative form of culture contact? Why did cultural assimilation stop short of these few traits while so many other incentives and wants are spreading from the capital to the rural districts? When we examined, in a previous chapter, the different sex morality in town and country, we discovered its close functional interrelation with other social facts. Behind the divergent attitude we perceived the effectiveness of political and economic factors. This also points out the answer of the present problem. Sex morality can change only together with those other social determinants. Let me recall the main facts. Negative facts, such as the absence in the village of the 'double morality' of the capital, and also the absence of a large floating population which proved one of the incentives for the creation of semi-professional prostitution in the town. Positive facts, such as the more closely knit village life, which forbids the open and condoned matrimonial laxity characteristic of Bida; the efforts of peasant family heads to provide bride-price for an early marriage of the men, and thus to maintain the labour-unit; the conditions of labour in peasant households which tend to preclude sexual promiscuity among the women. The 'negative' culture contact which we are observing does not, then, represent a failure of assimilation in certain specific domains of culture, but the inertia of a cultural whole which cannot suffer changes in these domains without undergoing far-reaching changes itself.

The same is true of the incentive of travelling. In Bida, travelling serves the political interests of the ruling group; it is helpful to the productive enterprises of the town population; and it follows the political interests converging in the capital of the kingdom. None of these factors exists in the village. On the contrary, productive organization, political and religious life, move in a narrow compass beyond which the community affords no protection or promise of attachment.

In the case of the other, minor, instances of cultural divergence, which refer only to the form which a particular satisfaction takes, one might argue that the essential similarity of the wants themselves must tend to retard a more complete assimilation. But here again we must view the situation under the aspect of the cultural whole and the close integration within the whole even of apparently ephemeral traits. The appreciation of a certain kind of drink or a certain style of dance is indeed built firmly into the framework of village culture. Thus all religious rituals involve a libation of beer. The temptation to replace it with palm-wine would have to break down, not only an existing nutritive habit, but also, partly, the spiritual background against which the people (consciously or unconsciously) must regard their traditional beverage. The alternative solution of admitting palm-wine, and having different drinks for ritual and profane purposes, would involve an equally radical change in other

¹ See p. 39.

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world they have almost monopolized river traffic.¹ Let me say a few words about the river trade which Kede canoes have carried for centuries up and down the River Niger: comparatively few of the trade goods are destined for inland trade; the majority come from and go to places outside Nupe country. The Kede ship south: gowns (of Hausa and Nupe make), horses from Hausa, potash from Lake Chad, Nupe-made mats and straw hats, fish and rice from the Niger; and north: kola nuts from the markets in Southern Nigeria, European salt, and palm oil.

In this river traffic the Kede canoeman assumes two different roles: he is either a contractor who hires his canoe and crew (consisting of himself and his family members) out to a trader for a specific journey or he is both trader and contractor in one, carrying his own goods on his own craft. A variety of the first kind of occupation is the extensive ferry service which the Kede have established in certain places: here the Kede canoemen carry people, goods, and animals across the river for a small payment.²

The work of the Kede canoemen, though lucrative and admitting of big profits, is strenuous, exacting, and not infrequently dangerous. They must be prepared to go on long expeditions, which still to-day may be expeditions into the unknown.³ These river voyages mean long absence from home, often of many months, not only because of the distance of their destination, but also because of the many stops and long waits which they involve: thus the canoemen may have to wait in a certain place till the river becomes navigable again; or till they have filled their canoes with

¹ The division between fishermen and canoemen among the Kede is rarely rigid—members of a fisherman family may take to canoe-work or canoemen spend their leisure time fishing; we will ignore this division in the following and concern ourselves only with the canoemen, who are of most interest to us. Originally the Kede also used to build their own canoes. The deforestation of the river banks forced these craftsmen to move south, where to-day they form a small colony of Kede canoe-builders near Onitsha. [576]

² The 'very lucrative' ferry service at certain riverports is mentioned in Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa* (1837), ii, p. 316. The most important ferry service of this kind to-day is at Jebba Island, where the Kede compete with the railway bridge, offering a cheaper service to the people who want to save the bridge toll.

³ The journey from Kede country to Onitsha and back—one of their regular tours—takes two to three months. In 1936 I saw ten Kede canoes being loaded in Jebba with petrol for the French Air Service in Fort Nyameh. The river journey up the Niger was new to the canoemen, and was expected to take three months.

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trading goods, or till they have found another 'passenger' (in native phraseology) to engage them for a profitable return journey.

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Here we grasp the significance of this productive system for the organization of settlement in Kede country. The long canoe expeditions necessitate fixed stopping and resting places, where the canoemen must be sure to find shelter and food and opportunity to refit their craft. The 'termini' of their river routes more specially will tend to become at least seasonal 'colonies' of Kede. The stopping and waiting places will naturally be chosen in accordance with commercial considerations. And, finally, there must be some system of political protection, which could ensure the safety (speaking of pre-British times) of these far-flung routes, the stopping places with their valuable stores, and the seasonal or permanent trading posts:¹ trading posts which, of necessity, tend to become political colonies—this gives us the formula of Kede settlement.

IV. Settlement

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We are fortunate in possessing data which allow us to trace in detail the history of settlement and population movement in Kede country. Our data are derived only partly from oral tradition. The history of Kede settlement reaches into the well-documented era of Nigerian exploration and British occupation; its last phases are happening under our very eyes. In addition to these historical records, we possess evidence of a different kind, which, indirectly, contributes considerably to our understanding of population movement in Kede country: it lies, as we shall see, in the lay-out and organization of the present-day Kede settlements themselves.

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According to Kede tradition, their tribal home was near the confluence of Niger and Kaduna, near Muregi, which, some time later, became their political capital. From there they are said to have extended their settlements, and rule at the same time, gradually over the river banks towards the north and the south

¹ A case in point is the uninhabited right bank of the Niger above Jebba, where constant raids by inland tribes (from Borgu) made settlement impossible. The left bank, on the other hand, could be adequately protected, and here the Kede established a settlement at Buka (it was later moved to Jebba). In the south, Kede canoes did not travel beyond Eggan in pre-British days. The river south of Eggan was the domain of the Kakanda, a warlike riverain tribe of non-Nupe stock, which refused Kede canoes admittance into their area. Trade goods for the south had to be trans-shipped at Eggan to Kakanda canoes.